



This week marks the one-year anniversary of the worst oil spill in American history. It is an appropriate time to reflect on the tragic events of last spring and to rethink our nation's flawed energy policy.

On April 20, 2010, BP's Deepwater Horizon oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico exploded in a terrible accident that took the lives of 11 workers and injured 17 more. The resulting oil spill dumped approximately 206 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. This spill was 7 to 19 times as large as the infamous and disastrous Exxon Valdez spill, based on varying estimates of the Exxon Valdez spill.

A full year after the worst oil spill in American history, our energy policy is still in great need of a major revamping. America remains unacceptably dependent on fossil fuels, and our oil drilling industry remains unsafe.

In the past year, we should have focused on reforming our energy policy and overhauled safety standards for oil production, however relentless obstructionism and filibusters blocked sensible reforms. The new House majority continues to ignore blatant safety hazards and pursue a reckless and extreme agenda to expand drilling along thousands of miles of American coastline without any environmental safeguards. These plans would despoil some of America's most environmentally sensitive places, including the coast of Alaska.

Just last week, the leadership of the House Committee on Natural Resources voted to advance three bills to expand offshore oil drilling (H.R. 1229, 1230 and 1231). Two of these would actually weaken crucial environmental and safety protections. Once again, Big Oil demonstrates its power over policy.

H.R. 1229 would require the Department of the Interior to reach a decision on oil drilling permit applications within 60 days. This bill would make it more difficult for the Interior Department to exercise good judgment and make decisions based on sound scientific evidence. It would force the Interior Department to rush to a decision and would not allow time for a thorough evaluation of a company's safety plans or of the environmental impact of a drilling proposal.

H.R. 1231 would open nearly America's entire coastline to oil drilling. This radical bill would go further than ever before, putting oil rigs along America's beaches. It would mandate oil leasing within the next six years off the coast of every Atlantic state from North Carolina to Maine, as well as Alaska and Southern California. It would allow drilling everywhere except the western coast of Florida and a couple small marine sanctuaries.

We ought to headline a legitimate reform agenda by eliminating the oil spill liability cap. The current cap is \$75 million, while the total costs of the BP oil spill number in the billions. Eliminating the liability cap will ensure that polluters pay to clean up their own messes and will give the oil industry a big incentive to focus on safety. Taxpayers should never be left on the hook for a private company's failure.

The next step should be to implement the recommendations of the bipartisan National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. The commission recommended extending the time period regulatory agencies have to review oil exploration proposals; requiring drilling companies to prepare a response plan that accounts for a true worst case scenario; improving the command structure for the federal response to oil spills.

The Obama administration has taken steps to reform the agency that oversees offshore drilling, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement. President Obama has installed new leaders at the agency, who have changed the culture of the agency and brought a new focus on safety. I'm pleased with the administration's progress. But a thorough and lasting overhaul will require Congressional action.

The BP oil spill was an unmistakable reminder of the many costs associated with our nation's reliance on fossil fuels. In addition to creating the potential for catastrophic spills that pollute our oceans and coastlines, our reliance on oil is undermining our national security, polluting our air, and permanently altering the Earth's climate. I will continue to work to move our country toward the use of clean and renewable energy.

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